THE MIRACLE OF CORAL GABLES

by

REX BEACH

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The *Miracle* of Coral Gables

Few people know this country better than Rex Beach. He is a man of true discrimination and taste. The beauty of Coral Gables won him immediately, and his enthusiasm has led him to write this book.

The *Miracle* of Coral Gables

By

Rex Beach

Illustrated by Edward A. Wilson

CORAL GABLES
FLORIDA

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The Dreamer

CHAPTER ONE

The Dreamer of Southern Florida

THIS is a story about a dreamer and his accomplishment, about a man whose eyes made pictures when they were shut; a man who beheld a stately vision and caused it to become a reality. At heart he was a writer, a poet, an artist, but fate with curious perversity decreed that he should write in wood and steel and stone and paint his pictures upon a canvas of spacious fields, cool groves and smiling waterways. His dream was to build a City Beautiful, without blot or blemish, without ugliness or dirt; a city of majestic size but of perfect harmony. A city planned with reverence and with care and built after the old Grecian ideal that nothing is so sacred as the beautiful: that was his vision.

It was a "dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was," and he must have dreamed it at the break of day, when imaginings of that sort come true, for he was not a rich man and he had little except faith and a

splendid energy to draw against; nevertheless, his plan has taken shape, his city stands revealed. It is.

In telling of this achievement I shall have to speak more often of the man himself than he would like, for he is modest and too deeply absorbed in his work to feel very much pride in anything except its success.

Florida, as you know, rests like a lance with its tip outthrust some four hundred miles towards the Spanish Main. Its head, like that of any lance, is tempered; it has a cutting edge of coral rock laid down by myriads of tiny living things that have been at work for ages.

Down near the lower end of the state lived this boy who wanted to be a poet; he took his living from the soil and as he worked he had his visions of great accomplishments. It was a fertile, well-watered soil and the climate was truly tropical; even the pines were not the sort that grow elsewhere in Florida, they were the Caribbean variety. And Royal Palms grew wild. It was a friendly land, with a promise richer than any other which his fancy could picture, so naturally he longed to tell about it. He heard the whisper of voices and he tried to set them down.

Perhaps they were real voices, voices of those tiny people who built Florida up out of the sea, or murmurs from the coral caves. Why not?

There *are* whispering voices in Florida. I have heard them: so can you on any moonlit night when the wind is at play among the palm leaves. It is a land of enchantment and things fanciful happen there.

Anyhow, it pleases me to imagine that the voices of those patient builders spoke to the boy and urged him to build, to create. Also, that when he tried to create in words, they said:

"No! Build something more solid; make your poems live in stone. We have raised a land for you: upon the walls of our houses rear houses for men. We wrought in beauty, do you the same."

The boy listened and, as he grew older, his dream took shape. He built his city.

George Edgar Merrick is the man; his city is set among pines and palms and flaming poincianas and he calls it Coral Gables. It is, indeed, a city of coral gables, and of soft-tinted coral walls and splendid coral gateways, too. Even the streets are of ground coral—not the coral of which reefs and atolls are made, but a porous lime formation which resembles it and goes by that name. Upon the fields he used to till the stones have blossomed; those ragged, stubborn rocks he used to curse, he has caused to bloom into an eternal flower.

THE story of this man, who longed to create fine poems and who created, instead, a lovely city, is one of the most extraordinary tales that I have ever listened to and as romantic as anything which I, a writer of stories, have ever written. There is a flavor of Arabian magic to it, for Aladdin, with the aid of his lamp, could not have built more swiftly.

Miami, the Wonder City, had begun her amazing growth. Among those who believed implicitly in her

greatness was, of course, George Merrick. He lived only a few miles out and he had made a success of raising and shipping fruits and other produce, but in this new project of city building he saw something much more to his liking than agriculture. Instead of watching things grow, here was the opportunity to build with his own hands, to raise something which would not flower and fruit and then decay. Those voices were becoming plainer and he could hear what they were saying.

AS builder and developer he made a quick success—everybody, these last few years, with courage and faith in the future of Florida, succeeded. Miami grew with the astonishing rapidity of some rank tropical plant, and with it grew George Merrick's determination to build something even fairer and more satisfying, to erect a city of his own designing which would reflect the highest ideals in beauty, in comfort, and in convenience, and which would be more harmonious in plan, more exquisite in detail than any other city in the world.

He added to the land his father had owned until there were some sixteen hundred acres and then he announced Coral Gables. A good many people called him foolish; it was hard enough, they declared, to sell lots without prescribing what sort of houses the purchasers should build upon them. Merrick insisted upon one certain type of architecture throughout: what he called a modified "Mediterranean" style. It was neither pure Spanish

nor Italian, but a combination of what seemed best in each, with an added touch of gaiety to suit the Florida mood.

Florida has a mood, you know. She is young, she is animated, she has sparkle and "go"; there is a certain joyful abandon about her to which visitors owe obeisance.

What was this that Merrick talked about? A City Beautiful? America's Finest Suburb? A place where Castles in Spain are made real? Good advertising, but nobody took that stuff seriously; he'd better forget his Utopian ideas, get his money out and let nature take her course. Towns aren't made, they grow. Thus ran local comment.

Now, the course that nature takes in the ordinary suburban subdivision, as you must realize, is often a very dreadful course and results in the most distressing crimes against good taste. The unfettered American humor in home-building is likely to manifest itself in jigsaw decorations or in rococo atrocities of the mid-petroleum era; alongside a thatch-roofed English cottage is apt to flower some Greek bus-boy's dream of heaven, built of plaster-board. Our one distinctive contribution to architecture seems to be the sky-scraper, but as against that we are guilty of the California bungalow and it will take years to live that down.

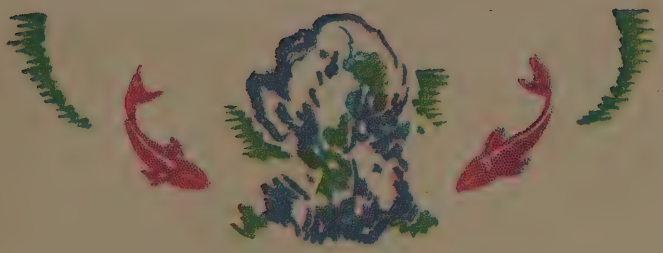
No. People told Merrick that he couldn't put over a proposition like his. Besides, Miami wasn't headed in his direction; it was bound for the beach.

He had a harder task, at first, to sell his idea than to dispose of his plots, for it was too large to be readily grasped. And his city was too big to be seen; there were so many trees in the way! He met these initial difficulties by taking his customers out in air-planes. Now, anybody who is not too agitated to see at all can perhaps see a good deal from an air-plane. I have my own theory about how he induced purchasers to buy and bankers to back him. I suspect he threatened to "loop" them if they refused. But I may be wrong. His enthusiasm may have turned the trick. On the other hand, experience convinces me that of all ways to sell land the air-plane method must be the easiest, for the first time I went up I would have gladly bought any part of the landscape beneath me, at any price, provided the pilot had contracted to put me in immediate possession of my purchase.

Anyhow, George Merrick began his city. The story of how he managed to secure the millions of dollars necessary to push it through; of how he carried his obligations alone and risked every cent he had made and could borrow; of how he met and overcame the inevitable discouragements that follow all untried enterprises, and finally "sold" his idea to the public; all this contains material for a good many stories but it is no part of this one. It is my purpose to deal with the accomplishment itself, and to show, if I can, that the story of Coral Gables is more than the history of a great land-selling enterprise, more, far more, than the

mere recital of a daring and successful real estate project. To me, it is the most important, and in many ways the most significant, experiment in intelligent city planning, city building and home development that has been attempted in our time; likewise, it is the most convincing demonstration we have yet seen of the might and the majesty of loveliness.

Fragrant Resting Places



CHAPTER TWO

The Concept of the Perfect City

THROUGH it Mr. Merrick is planting in thousands of people a new love of harmonious homes and an appreciation of the advantages and refinements of better living

Mind you, this doesn't mean that Coral Gables is intended as a dwelling place for the well-to-do alone; it is what the builder calls a "balanced city," planned to provide for people of all classes and of every income, and even the most modest houses are as carefully thought out and as charmingly executed as the finest. These latter, by the way, are very fine indeed. With this concept goes a comprehensive city design adhering to the basic idea of harmony, convenience, beauty and utility.

When I first saw Coral Gables, I beheld little except a few "different" houses, distinctive in style and attractive in coloring, a country club and golf course, and a great Venetian swimming pool hollowed out of the country rock. At that time—it was only a short while

ago—I could learn nothing of the conception back of it. Today it is a robust young city with more than two thousand residences built and building, each apparently more delightful than its neighbor, with a bustling business center, with schools, seminaries, banks, hotels, apartment and club houses. Houses, houses, going up everywhere. Some magic touch has transformed the very landscape; towering coconut and royal palms are firmly rooted where yesterday there was nothing; rich tropical foliage borders the sweeping drives; vines cling to the walls; pergolas have grown into bowers. One sees trees and plants and flowers the very names of which are unfamiliar outside the tropics, for the plan is to make Coral Gables a suburb as superior in the beauty and the luxuriance of its flora as it is distinctive in other respects. Miles upon miles of smooth, hard, shady streets that open into spacious plazas with fragrant resting places and tinkling Spanish fountains; canals that broaden into lakes and anchorages! It is a place to make you pinch yourself and rub your eyes.

IT has grown in size and in scope as miraculously as it has grown in beauty; from sixteen hundred acres it has spread out to ten thousand; along the shores of Biscayne Bay Mr. Merrick has envisioned a waterfront development as impressive as any ever undertaken and one which involves ten years of work and the spending of a hundred million dollars.

Ten years of work for an army of men, the spending of twenty times the purchase price of the entire state of

Florida, the building of academies, a university, sanitariums, clubs, casinos, playgrounds and what not, besides homes for a hundred thousand people! That is what George Merrick sees ahead of him and that is what the Coral Gables idea has grown to.

"When all that has been done," I inquired of him, "what are you going to turn to?"

He answered me with a boyish smile, "Well, I've never given up my desire to write."

Now a project of such magnitude as Coral Gables cannot be described in a few words—I have as yet given you only a broad survey of it; one of Mr. Merrick's airplane views—any more than it can be appreciated at a glance; it is too staggering in size. But Florida has been setting a new pace for the rest of America, these last few years, and she has established a new speed record in everything she has undertaken. Miami, for instance, grew four hundred and forty per cent during the first ten years of her expansion and other cities with a later start are pedalling madly to overtake her in the race. The desire to get somewhere quickly is reflected even in Florida's speed laws which permit forty-five miles an hour on her public roads. To be able to step on the gas without the spine-twisting necessity of looking backward is worth a lot to any motorist. It is worth a house and lot. Florida isn't looking backward, these days: her eyes are set straight ahead.

Enterprises too big to be readily comprehended are apt to be considered unsound; it is the softwoods that

grow swiftly, whereas oaks are the product of ages. This amazing growth of Florida towns and cities, this astonishing increase in land values, swifter and more feverish than anything this country has even seen, prompts skeptical outsiders to ask if it is warranted and to wonder if it is not merely part of a boom which will collapse. If so, then of course Mr. Merrick's plan for a completed suburb of a hundred thousand souls, like Miami's expectation of a million residents, will fail. Before going further, therefore, it will pay us to stop and to inquire as to the prospects for a realization of these ambitious undertakings.

In order to discover whether the Florida excitement is justified or is merely a bubble which will burst, we will have to widen our vision sufficiently to take in the whole state and likewise examine into the causes of this epoch-making trek to the tropics.

It so happens that I know the state reasonably well, for when I was a small boy my parents took me by the hand and snatched me thither to escape the snows of Michigan and to disappoint the pneumonia and other germs which lend such an exciting element of uncertainty to a continued residence in any northern clime. My father had grown sick of chilblains and was completely fed up on a climate consisting of three parts winter and one part late-in-the-fall, so he went as far south as the map permitted. I grew up in Florida, I absorbed an education from her schools, the most of which I promptly forgot, and having returned fre-

quently, I feel that I can talk with the authority of an intimate acquaintance and the freedom of a friend.

Based not alone upon my own knowledge and observation, but also upon the opinions of others, I claim that Florida has two assets, either of which is sufficient to more than warrant the growth she is undergoing. Her climate is one, her soil is the other. She was discovered by the rich, for the profit of the poor and those of moderate means. She began as a fad and has become a winter-time necessity. She has an inexhaustible pay-streak, not in her sand but in her sky: it is as wide as her boundaries and so long as snow flies further north, so long as the sun shines and the Gulf stream flows that pay-streak will return steady dividends. So long as flowers bloom, birds sing and children laugh; so long as men revel in the beautiful and aspire to old age, so long will Florida remain a playground and a sanctuary. The gold in her flaming sunsets is real gold.

THERE is but one Florida and one California and the American people are learning how to play. It took several generations to learn that life is not all work and that the grave is not its goal, but the discovery leaked out and it is spreading like a rash.

If Florida's rocks were gold-bearing or if she sat with her feet in a vast pool of petroleum like some of her sister states, the hardest-boiled skeptics would admit that she was rich, but even so she would not be richer than she is in the possession of her climate. Mines can be worked out and oil wells run dry: her sun will never cool.

Where Tropic Trade Winds Blow

CHAPTER THREE

Trail Blazers on a New Frontier

THERE are periods of migration in the lives of people, times when they move *en masse*. It may be the urge of some restless tribal inheritance or merely an effort at readjustment to geographical limitations; in any event, America has had many such migrations, as, for instance, the rush of Forty-nine, the several movements into the farming regions of the middle and the northwest, the Klondike stampede and the recent surge to Southern California. These hegiras are due to the desire of men to improve their living conditions and their eagerness to seek surroundings of greater opportunity. Such a movement is now going on towards Florida, but there is nothing novel about it, nor is it any more artificial or any harder to understand than the rush which populated the West and brought it under the plow.

The emigrants are not using covered wagons, to be sure; they are going south in Pullmans and in Packards,

in steel ships and in tin Lizzies, but so great is their number that new highways are being laid, double tracks are being put down and steamships are being built and chartered to handle the traffic. It is merely the pushing out of a pioneer people towards a new frontier. We are a nation of trail blazers and we never come home, except to visit.

The progress of this modern gas-wagon train is not punctuated by the crack of bull whips, as in former days, but by the sound of blowouts and punctures. Nothing except the profanity is what it was.

The leisure class adopted Florida long since as a winter playground, but people of moderate means are beginning to realize that they can afford it. In many parts of the North it is cheaper to go south for the winter than to buy coal, and good roads make it unnecessary to purchase a railroad ticket.

The golf bug and the influenza germ are selling Florida farms and town lots faster than the highest pressure salesman; the purchase of property down there is not a speculation in lands but an investment in health.

If Florida abandoned her citrus groves and her farms to weeds, closed her mills and factories and loosed her herds, she would, nevertheless, continue to fill up every winter with visitors and she would still remain a great and prosperous resort.

But in addition to this perennial horde of health and pleasure-seekers there is another army on the march and it is made up of small investors, of workers in search

of permanent homes and steady employment. They are pouring into the state like water into a funnel and it is they who will bring the greatest stability; it is they to whom far-sighted Floridians look with particular pride and satisfaction.

In March, 1925, there was held at West Palm Beach a meeting of representative business men from all parts of the state and they organized themselves into the Florida Development Board. Florida had just ended her richest tourist season, the men at that convention had profited enormously therefrom, so they committed themselves and the state to raise and spend for publicity a million and a half dollars during the next five years. But publicity for what? For the purpose of increasing the already abundant yield of the tourist crop? No. To further scientific research into the natural resources of the state and to acquaint the people of America with what Florida has to offer the permanent settler. They knew that the rush of pleasure-seekers could not be stemmed; what they discussed was farming, education, freight rates, markets, industries and the like.

It is their belief, and it is mine, that Florida is richer in undeveloped natural wealth than perhaps any state in the Union, and that if tomorrow her winter visitors should cease coming she would continue to forge steadily ahead and to reap a greater profit from her soil than from her climate.

This may be news to those who have looked upon the state as a sand-lot with nothing for sale except sun-

shine and a place incapable of raising anything except hotel prices. If it is true, then Florida is indeed sitting pretty. Let's see whether it is true or whether it is merely the seductive song of the realtor.

We shall have to use some figures, the which I hate as much as you do, but statistics can sometimes be made interesting, as any father of a large and growing family will testify.

LET us begin with Miami, and when we have done with her let us take a hasty glance at the state as a whole, for after all, the story of Coral Gables, which I set out to tell, is the story of Miami, and the story of Miami is the story of Florida.

Miamians declare that their city never has had a "boom," that it is not having one now and that its growth from a village of about one thousand inhabitants to a city of one hundred and eleven thousand in twenty-five years is largely the result of the permanent productive resources at its door. Its further expansion into a metropolis of a million people, they assure you, will not greatly depend upon its tourists. It is almost a waste of time, by the way, to set down Miami's "present population"; it means so much rubbing out and writing of new figures.

Dade County, in which Miami is situated, has a practical monopoly of the actual "American tropics" so-called, at least an East Coast monopoly. Killing frosts are unknown, its soil is rich and liberally watered, which means that the fruits and vegetables native to

tropical countries can be raised in commercial quantities, plus also many of the crops that grow in cooler climates. Something is fruiting on the farms every month of the year.

Oranges and grapefruit, of course, do well in Dade County; their quality is famous and they are usually the first on the market, but the mango and the avocado find here a location better adapted to their culture than any other in the United States. They are magnificent fruits, they command a ready market and their raising is profitable. The mango is the most ancient of fruits and in Dade County fancy varieties have been developed. The avocado—Floridians dislike the name "alligator pear"—is the most nutritious and valuable food fruit now under cultivation and it bears the year round. Groves have shown a yield of $2,000 per acre and near Miami you can see one avocado tree which has produced an average of $200 a year for six years. The county shipped 30,000 crates last year and many of the groves are not yet in bearing.

South of Miami lies the Redlands section, an astonishingly fertile truck-gardening region which is given over largely to tomato raising. Sixteen thousand acres of early tomatoes is a nice asset for any county. But there seems to be no limit to what the soil and the climate of Dade County can raise and, mind you, out of nearly a million and a half acres, less than 60,000 are in cultivation and these lie in a narrow strip along the coast. Back of this are the Everglades, perhaps the

richest agricultural lands in the world, certainly the most fertile area of its size in the country. Here, almost untouched, is the fairest promise of Florida's dreams, an enormous level bed of black humus under a sky like the glass roof of a hot-house; here, once the land is drained, can be grown enough vegetables to feed a nation.

THE average person has a wholly wrong idea of these 'Glades. Not much is generally known about them—or is an Everglades an "it"! Listen, for example, to the Encyclopaedia Brittanica's definition: "An American lake, about 8,000 square miles, in which are numerous half-submerged islands."

Oh, Mr. Brittan! You should be more careful what you put in your books! You're as wrong as arson.

I had some such erroneous idea about the Everglades when I was a schoolboy. I pictured them as an enormous black-water swamp grown up to matted vegetation, infested with serpents, alligators and miasmas. I had never seen a miasma, but I could guess what it looked like. This swamp was a trackless wilderness through the gloom of which slipped Seminole canoes paddled by treacherous redskins. It was my ambition to head a band of hardy adventurers of my own age and exterminate the whole dastardly tribe—until I heard an actual account of the first expedition to cross the Everglades. The men in that party (it was in 1892) had waded practically across the state from Fort Shackleford to Miami, with packs on their backs. They had

subsisted for the last week on two tablespoonsful of raw hominy per man and the only bloodshed had been caused by mosquitoes. I knew my band of explorers would never consent to eat raw hominy so I abandoned the enterprise.

I crossed the Everglades recently in a limousine, at forty miles an hour. Another dream punctured. If a man can't believe his Encyclopaedia, what can he believe?

What I beheld was an almost limitless plain, as level as a ballroom floor and practically devoid of trees, its mellow soil laid over a foundation of porous lime rock. Canals run through it and the rock taken out is utilized for road-building: wherever the land is drained it will raise crops to astonish the northern gardener.

This drainage problem is not so simple as it sounds, for danger comes with its overdoing. Drop a cigarette on a tract that is well dried out and the soil will burn. Successful reclamation, therefore, involves scientific water regulation as well as disposal. This the state of Florida is working out in co-operation with the Federal government and once it is effected it will render available an enormous acreage capable of supporting a population denser than that of the Dutch lowlands. Already millions of dollars have been invested in sugar plantations and mills and a beginning has been made to manufacture and make use of the many tropical fibre plants and grasses which can be raised thereon. So, too, with rubber which is indigenous to the country; with cotton and tobacco, bananas, pineapples and Heaven

knows what. A northern paper company is planting a hundred thousand acres to peanuts just for the oil. The oil is needed to use up the hydrogen gas which is a by-product of their Maine pulp mills. The finished product is a hard, white fat, a vegetable lard.

CHAPTER FOUR

A New American Skyline

THIS muck land doesn't wait for the farmer, it goes to work as soon as it is drained. There is a common weed in Florida, known by the amply descriptive name of "careless weed." In the reclaimed Everglades it grows so big that a man can climb it! Exaggeration, you say. But I saw a photograph of a man standing in the branches of one, and his feet were shoulder high above the ground. Dirt which will grow stuff like that will grow anything. It can be shipped as fertilizer, and the 'Glades farmer is faced with the necessity of "thinning" it out, reducing its fertility, instead of enriching it.

As a beef-raising and dairy country nothing finer ever laid out-of-doors. What with year-round natural forage of luxuriant tropical grasses, cattle, I was solemnly assured, grow so fat on this fodder that they run eleven to the dozen. And hogs! Put a pine-woods razor-back in the Everglades and in a week he'll have a double chin.

Venice Comes to Coral Gables

Barely the fringe of this area is being worked, as yet, but in the vicinity of Miami the land is selling as high as a thousand dollars an acre. And why not when it can be made to yield that much in a year? I learned of a man who last season took $900 worth of Irish potatoes off of three-quarters of an acre and of another whose crop of string beans from a single acre sold for $2,400.

When one stops to consider that in certain Asiatic countries entire families support themselves upon the yield from a fraction of an acre of land no richer than this and that ownership of one whole acre means independence, how can he visualize the potentialities of the five million acres in the southern counties of Florida or estimate the numbers of workers to whom it will some day afford a livelihood?

Mid-western communities, where the farms yield from $20 to $50 an acre, have built up and support large cities; with a million and a half acres in Dade County alone, besides millions of other acres nearby, much of which will return a profit of from $100 to $1,000 a year, is it unreasonable of Miamians to expect a city of a million souls? Not at all.

In any event, that is Miami's aim and she is putting herself in order to accommodate that number of people. Already her skyline begins to look like New York's and the price of her downtown real estate is as high as her skyline.

Last year she had no steamship lines from the north, this year she has more than her docking space will ac-

commodate and new vessels are being added weekly. She is a logical point of contact with Latin-American countries and is making harbor improvements designed to render her the principal Pan-American port of the Atlantic. With the development of her back country and with the new railroad accommodations which are now being effected she expects to load most of the phosphate and much of the lumber of the state. It is not without reason that she looks forward to more shipping than New Orleans, Galveston or Savannah.

So much then for this immediate section, which by no means has a corner on Florida's native wealth. The coast counties to the north, all the way up to Jacksonville, are rich; each, it seems, has a soil and a climate unique unto itself, each boasts a city which hopes to rival the queen city to the south. Residents of one locality in Florida will not attempt to deny or to belittle the advantages of any other locality, such being contrary to the general code of ethics; they will agree that all Florida is fine. After this admission they will then set out to show you that of all the desirable places in the state for a man to live and die in, this one particular spot has it over the others like a tent.

From present indications the entire lower East Coast will soon be a continuous chain of winter resorts, its water front lined with splendid homes, its back country checkerboarded with fruit groves, dairies, vegetable farms and truck gardens.

But the East Coast is only a part of Florida. Follow

me on a motor trip that I took recently and perhaps it will open your eyes, as it did mine, to the vastness of the state's possibilities and to the extent of this history-making rush to our last frontier.

From Miami to Palm Beach, and further, one "development" follows another, every town is growing, the land is being cleared and built upon; teams, tractors, dredges are at work. It is a scene of astonishing activity.

The Connors Highway is a toll road from the Palm Beach section to Lake Okeechobee: it is a shiny ribbon of oiled rock laid down upon the crest of one of the drainage canal banks and it opens up a tremendous area of Everglades land resembling those tule lands of California where the Japanese have made such a success of wholesale gardening. Many canals are being dug, other roads are building. As far as you can see one acre looks as good as another.

Lake Okeechobee is a fresh water sea fed by rivers and by enormous springs and I was surprised to learn that it supports important commercial fisheries which are yearly growing in value. It is a bait-casters' heaven, by the way: big mouth bass weighing twenty pounds have been taken on rod and reel.

West, beyond the horizon, lies the prosperous Moore Haven district, famous for its productivity, and still on beyond is Fort Myers, the Miami of the West Coast tropics. North of the lake is Okeechobee City, a spick and span town with the magnificent ambition of be-

coming the agricultural metropolis of the state. Everything hereabouts is pretty raw as yet; hard-surfaced roads are something novel and the railroad spikes haven't had time to get rusty. Here, as in every other town I visited, the chief concern of the residents is how and where to house the home-seekers which this winter will surely bring.

NORTH for seventy-five miles extends the Kissimmee valley, if a country almost too flat to drain itself can be called a valley, and here, too, lie thousands of acres of swamp lands for reclamation.

Perhaps you don't know that Florida is a "cow country," but it is. The largest cattle ranch east of the Mississippi lies on the Kissimmee River: 220,000 acres under fence. Several years ago a group of northern lumbermen undertook to buy a hundred thousand acres of pine land in this section and made the owner an offer of three dollars an acre. The price was satisfactory but the deal fell through because the purchasers wanted nothing but the timber and firmly refused to be saddled with the land. Today, memory of that transaction gives them an acute headache.

Extending north and south through the center of the state, like a backbone, is the "ridge country," in some respects the fairest section of all Florida. It is a range of low hills made up of that sandy soil so favorable to citrus growing, and nestling between the hills are myriads of friendly blue lakes of clear, soft water. Orange and grapefruit groves are everywhere, their un-

dulating rows marching away to the horizon. From the crest of every ridge other groves appear and other lakes smile through the pines. They are young groves, most of them, for this country, too, has just been discovered. New homes, new business blocks, new hotels in every town, and everywhere the same boast and the same complaint: "This is the finest spot in all Florida." "What are we going to do with this winter's visitors?"

Chambers of Commerce are appealing for funds with which to build temporary barracks to shelter the coming hordes.

Central Florida is the Land of Ten Thousand Lakes, and it has a shore line sufficient to afford water-front homes for a million families. Sebring, Lakeland, Kissimmee, Orlando, Sanford, each is "the loveliest spot in Florida."

Great blessings often come in the guise of calamities. It took the scourge of the boll weevil to teach southern cotton planters the value of diversified farming. Florida used to depend almost entirely upon orange culture, but thirty years ago a freeze wiped out most of the groves in the central and northern parts of the state. Things looked pretty blue for a while after that and land could be bought for almost nothing. Then, in a certain locality, somebody tried tomato raising and was astonished to find that it paid better than citrus growing. Soon that entire region was engaged in gardening.

At Sanford, which the freeze had left flat on its back

and feebly kicking, another man experimented with celery and others followed his example. They grew rich, and today you don't have to be told that Sanford is the celery center of the south, you can smell it before you come in sight of the town. It shipped $4,000,000 worth last season.

So, too, at Hastings, where the Irish potato attains its greatest size and ferocity. I am not much of an agriculturist but I am told that potato hunting has put Hastings on Easy Street and that all a sportsman needs to bag his limit is a rake.

Plant City, as a result of its misfortune, learned to specialize in strawberries: 10,000 quarts have been raised on a single acre and sold for forty-five cents a quart.

Elsewhere it is the same story. Near Quincy, a great poultry and dairy district, a tobacco-grower reported last year a new profit of $2,000 an acre from forty acres of Sumatra wrappers and Sumatra wrappers are being worn extensively this season. Land like that could raise bell-bottom pants.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Rediscovery of Florida

THERE are more than one hundred different qualities of soil in the state, each suitable for something and there are twenty million acres, a large part of which can be made to yield. Pineapples and pecans, citrus and celery, cattle and cantaloupes, egg plants of the hen and the vegetable variety—almost anything can be made to pay.

Why isn't more being raised, you inquire? Who has kept Florida such a dark secret? Why is it that less than one acre out of ten is broken? For one thing, the state has just been discovered. Columbus found it but the New York Four Hundred put it on the map; Palm Beach and the one-piece bathing suit advertised it more than Ponce de Leon and the Overseas Railroad.

Blame it on climate, easy living, hook-worm or what you will, the Florida farmer of the old type elevated shiftlessness to the dignity of a real accomplishment, if not of an actual art.

Ponce de Leon's Wonderland

I remember one of the sort who complained that his corn patch had played out until it would barely yield ten bushels to the acre.

"Why don't you fertilize it?" somebody inquired.

The fellow languidly shook his head and replied:

"Lord! If I manured that patch of mine, the weeds would git so thick my woman couldn't see to hoe it."

This type of husbandman is rapidly going out of style down there: the day of intelligent, energetic, intensive culture is dawning.

In one place I was told of a man, well along in years, who had been brought into the country on a stretcher to die but who decided to play a trick on the doctors and get well. The Florida climate puts elderly people up to pranks of that sort. He had carried out his little joke, and moreover he was getting rich on five acres of hammock land.

"This year he raised six thousand dollars worth of celery on one acre," said my informant.

"Impossible!" I declared. "I know this state backwards; cut off a couple of ciphers, or even one, and we'll let the matter drop."

"Want to bet a hundred dollars I'm wrong?" the man inquired. "If you do, I'll bet you another hundred that you've made a bad bet."

Caution prompted me to evade a direct answer. Why profit from a stranger's enthusiasm when money can be so easily come by in Florida town lots, I asked myself?

I'm glad I didn't bet. In refusing that wager I con-

sider that I made a clean hundred dollars, for I saw the farmer, went over his land and talked to him. He raised $6,250 worth of celery from that acre in question, besides which he harvested two other crops off the same piece, one of mustard, I believe, and the other of okra, and they yielded him about two thousand dollars more. During the several years he has been working that land he has averaged, from a variety of crops, more than four thousand dollars an acre. No wonder! It is practically solid leaf mould into which he can thrust a rake handle up to the head.

When I asked him why he didn't clear the rest of his land and cultivate it, he said:

"It takes all my time and all the help I can get to work these five acres. I'm doing well enough and if my farm was any bigger it would get away from me. You can't let this land lie idle or it will have to be cleared all over again."

There are many acres of land like this in Florida and little of it is being worked.

Funny things are happening in farm properties down there, as well as in city real estate. A man got a price on an orange grove; terms one-third down, the balance on time. While the ink on the contract was drying, he sold the green crop, as it hung on the trees, for enough to cover the first payment. The fruit buyer took all risks.

The boom was slow in reaching the West Coast and that part of it from Tampa to Fort Myers is about

where the Miami section was five years ago, but everywhere the same story is being repeated. St. Petersburg was one of the first to capitalize her sunshine, but in the beginning she was known principally to people in the middle west and her winter sports ran to roque, checkers, and horseshoe hurling. Some painstaking statistician, interested in vital facts, claimed figures to show that the flowing beards in St. Petersburg, if laid tip to chin, would reach farther than all the binder twine in both Dakotas. The quoit-pitchers are still there, roque and checkers remain popular forms of dissipation, but the elderly mid-westerners are lost among the busy throngs from every part of the union. St. Petersburg is metropolitan, her country clubs are as "smart," her hotels are as huge and as high-priced as any in the state. I believe one of her newspapers still adheres to its old practice of giving away its copies on any day that the sun doesn't shine.

Clearwater, famous as the golfer's mecca, is a town of about six thousand, but it has plotted its curves and can prove to you that it will be a city of a hundred thousand within five years, at the present rate of growth. It is without doubt, "the finest spot in Florida."

Tampa, "finer than any other place in the state," and second only to Jacksonville in size, is fairly bursting her seams. She is growing like one of those careless weeds I described and her shallow bay is being dredged and filled with islands which will give her a Venetian charm. Less than two years ago the first "under-seas"

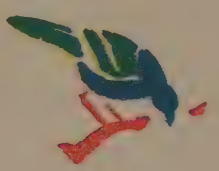
lots, then populated principally by mullet and catfish, were offered for sale. People stood in line forty hours to buy, and the first man up, so the story goes, chained himself to the door in order to be sure of maintaining his place. Today people are living on those lots and public buildings are going up around them.

Sarasota, Punta Gorda, Fort Myers, everywhere the same history is being written; towns are building, lands are doubling and trebling in value. Wherever roads are laid down, purchasers come and homeseekers follow.

Brooksville, less than fifty miles north of Tampa, until a year ago, lacked a hard-surfaced road and to go there was an adventure. Now it is booming and points with pride to the lumber and farming possibilities of its great hard-wood hammocks, and its fertile hills. Inside the town limits is a ten-acre tangerine grove which paid a net profit of $16,000 last year.

"Why, stranger," a local resident told me, "we can ship this Hernando County soil in bags and get rich. We've sure got the garden spot of this state."

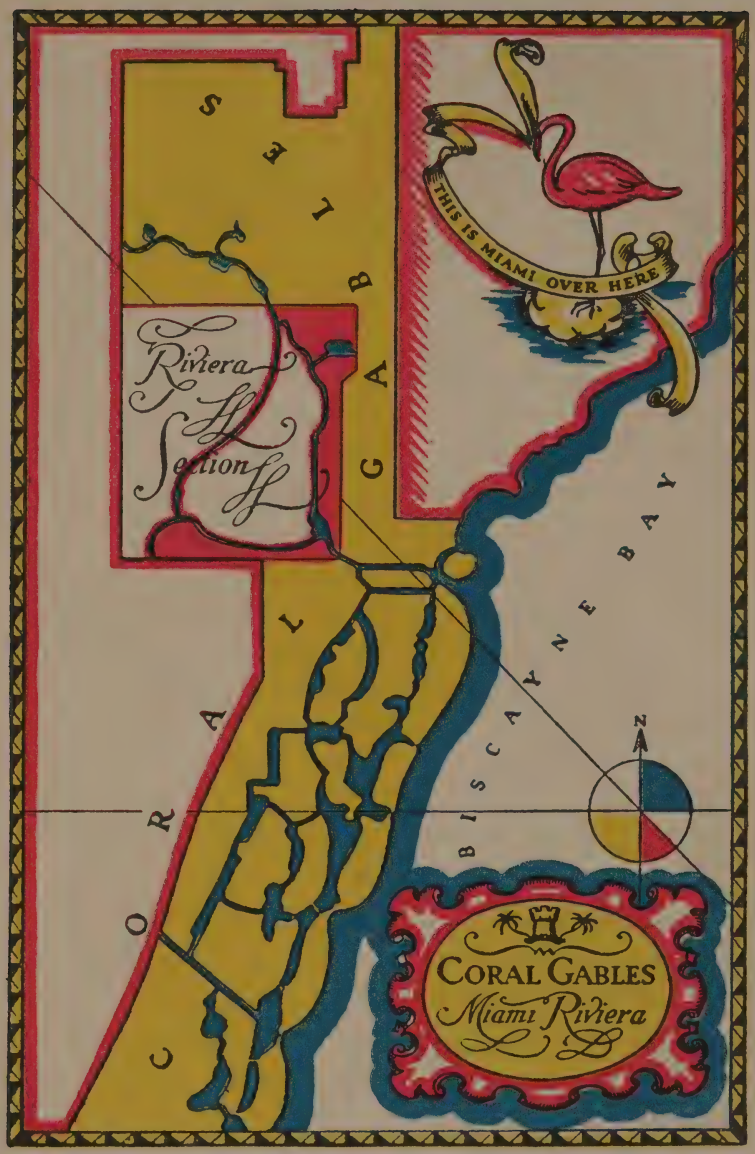
Perhaps I have told you enough to prove my contention that Florida could carry on, if she had to, without the help of those who invest in health or come for recreation.



CHAPTER SIX

The Greatest Development Drama in History

MOST of my novels deal with significant phases in the development of this country; such as the rush to the far north, the digging of the Panama Canal, the exploitation of Alaskan wealth, the quest of oil in the southwest, for in their meaning and their consequences I see a wider drama than in the affairs of men. Such a drama is unfolding in Florida but it is bigger, it is more exciting and it is more significant than any mass movement I have written about. It reminds me of a certain motion picture, now showing, which depicts the heroic struggle of a primitive Asiatic tribe to move its herds in search of grass. Their journey leads through deserts, across raging rivers, up and over a great, frowning timberless mountain range capped with ice and snow. Barefooted, ill-clad men, women and children push on and upward, driving their hungry herds and carrying their own sick and feeble, together with the young



Miami's Mightiest Unit

animals in their arms or on their backs. They leave blood in their tracks.

This rush to the far southland is another quest for "grass," with the hardships missing. But these people will not return.

Much the same thing happened when Indian Territory was thrown open. The settlers settled; they made Oklahoma. California was discovered and then rediscovered; her lands will never again be cheap. Why should the Florida "bubble" burst?

California is a regal state but much of her land is pure, inspiring scenery; only her plains and valleys are tillable. She doubled her population twice in twenty years. Florida has neither mountains nor deserts, she is blessed with water from above and below and her climate is such that her crops are mainly high-priced specialties rather than staples; she is today where California was twenty years ago. She is doing what California and every other new state did, viz., bidding for people to mint her riches into coin.

The real values of any state are its land values, based upon yield: fixed population, in the last analysis, springs from the soil. Florida has the land and the plows are coming. She can easily ship half a billion dollars of farm produce every season, aside from her livestock, her fish, her phosphate rock, her lumber and naval stores. She markets a billion feet of lumber annually and out of her standing pines, in summer, drips $50,000 a day.

When all these products have been marketed, she still has the proceeds from her tourist crop as "velvet." Situated almost within commuting distance of three-quarters of the population and seven-eighths of the wealth of the United States that crop is bound to increase.

It may strike you that I have strayed far from my story of Coral Gables, but the digression was intentional. No project so ambitious as that of Mr. Merrick's, it seems to me, could well be carried out unless it were based upon a foundation of solid growth, not only for Miami but also for the entire state. Perhaps, too, we shall have gained a better idea of the significance of that undertaking for having seen what is going on elsewhere down there; certainly it is interesting to compare the results of the one-man idea in city building with the results of the composite idea as reflected in the other Florida cities, old and new.

HAD I not been deeply impressed by that comparison I would not have undertaken this article. Men of vision, of courage, and of abundant energy have worked wonders in and around Miami: more and greater wonders than elsewhere in the state. The metamorphosis of a sandy key backed by a mangrove swamp into a magnificent playground with miles of boulevards, with hotels and mansions and polo fields and golf courses is an example. The creation of enchanted islands linked together by sweeping causeways, like sparkling gems strung upon a silken thread,

is another. Wherever nature has given those Miami builders something, anything, upon which to base a majestic plan of betterment, there they have loosed their millions and miracles have resulted. And yet they have gone only so far. Out of the ooze, out of the very waters, they have made land, but there they have rested. Merrick had his land to begin with; his task has been to develop, to co-ordinate and to beautify.

After a trip through Florida one comes back to Coral Gables with the feeling that it is something altogether different from anything else in the state, and that here is an abstract idea made real and understandable.

Somebody asked Heine why men no longer build such piles as the Cathedral of Amiens and he replied:

"In those days men had convictions, we moderns have opinions, and it requires something more than an opinion to build a Gothic cathedral."

The rudest work that tells a story or records an ambition is better than the finest without meaning and it required a very deep conviction to build Coral Gables. The following words might very well have come from George Merrick's lips:

"I would have, then, our ordinary dwelling houses built to last, and built to be lovely: as rich and full of pleasantries as may be within and without. . . . . Therefore, when we build let us think that we build forever, let it not be for present delight, nor for present use alone, let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for."

Ruskin wrote those sentences, but they appear to quite completely voice the feelings of the builder of this modern Mediterranean city.

Mr. Merrick is making his houses "rich and full of pleasantries," and they are being built not alone for present delight. Nor are they flung down haphazard, where colors may clash and one architecture may scream at another.

We Americans are great organizers and great developers, but as city builders we do not rank far above the Aztecs. We have two methods of laying out our towns; the cowpath and the criss-cross. Observe Boston or downtown New York. Or Chicago, that apotheosis of geometrical regularity. These methods result in ugly, swollen, inconvenient cities, economical in land but wasteful of things more precious; money-making cities of bitter men, faded women and feeble, gas-bleached children.

Coral Gables was not worked out with a pencil and ruler on any such careless principle; artists, city planners, landscape architects, construction and utility engineers, each an authority in his own line, worked over it and under their supervision it is going forward.

"We had more difficulty at first in selling the idea of architectural harmony than in selling the land," Mr. Merrick confessed. "People resented it as a sort of censorship of their good taste. But we have no difficulty now. It is surprising how enthusiastically they took hold once they fully understood and appreciated our purpose."

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Master Impulse Behind Coral Gables

THE thought back of Coral Gables isn't new, it is so old that it is novel, that's all. Ever since the days of the great builders of the Renaissance architects have cherished the dream of a city designed under one master impulse and here is the first actual experiment on a large scale. Washington has been "planned," to be sure, but only along broad lines and not in detail.

The first real example of architectural unity which we, in this country, had a chance to observe was the Chicago World's Fair. From that gleaming city on the Jackson Park lagoons Americans carried away a new appreciation of structural beauty, and the expositions that followed it fixed and heightened that appreciation. But all were dream cities and the first winter wind blew them away like chaff.

Here in Florida is growing a World's Fair city of concrete, made to live in; a mirage turned to stone and

"Rich and Full of Pleasantries"

framed in a setting of tropical loveliness made lovelier by the cunning of skilled landscape engineers.

Never was a location more favored for building, for most of the material lies underfoot. At first sight the land looks sterile, for the rock crops out loosely and the soil is so shallow that trees have to be planted with dynamite. Holes have to be blasted. But the more one sees of that rock, the greater blessing it becomes.

A foot or two under the surface it is soft and therefore cheap to dig; exposure hardens it. Crush it, size it, add water and cement and you have concrete that will defy the ravages of time. Run the mixture into moulds and you have building blocks. If you prefer rough field-stone walls, select the boulders which have hardened in the air and lay them up in mortar, or if your taste runs to square, quarried blocks skilled artisans with hatchets will shape the soft rock and time will turn it to flint. It will age into pink and mellow ivory. To build streets lay the stone soft, roll it and oil it and the surface is like asphalt.

Things will grow in that coral rock. Shoot a hole in one of those smooth roads, plant a tree in it, scratch enough soil in to cover the roots and it will live. Live and do well. Capillarity will draw moisture up to the roots and they will reach down through the interstices.

Walls capable of such variety in treatment can be made beautiful, but that which first strikes any eye are roofs, and the roofs of Coral Gables are like fine old oriental rugs. Most of them are of Spanish tile moulded

by hand over the naked thighs of workmen now long dead. Cuban roofs, torn from crumbling convents and ruined haciendas, their patterns blended, their colors softened by tropic sun and weather, have been relaid here and they are a delight to behold.

When a northern visitor, still itching from his winter woolens, comes upon one of these charming Mediterranean homes, half hidden and half revealed by vines and fragrant flowering shrubbery, when he hears overhead the whisper of restful voices among the palm fronds and through the green of orange and mango and lacy pine he glimpses other houses of tinted coral, other roofs that glow like bits from the magic carpet of Bagdad, he is very apt to decide that his wanderings are over. Florida is likely to take on a new meaning to him, right there and then, and likewise the problem of living. If he has read John Boyle O'Reilly he may quote this verse:

"I am weary of planning and toiling
In the crowded hives of men;
Heart weary of building and spoiling
And spoiling and building again;
And I long for the dear old river
Where I dreamed my youth away;
For a dreamer lives forever,
And a toiler dies in a day."

Or if he is not poetical and is perhaps a bit winded from wrestling with his last income tax return, he may

recall the fact that Florida income and inheritance tax provisions make it possible for a wealthy man to save money by building a Florida home and that a man of moderate means may, by taking up a residence there, effect a sufficient saving to carry the cost of a house and lot.

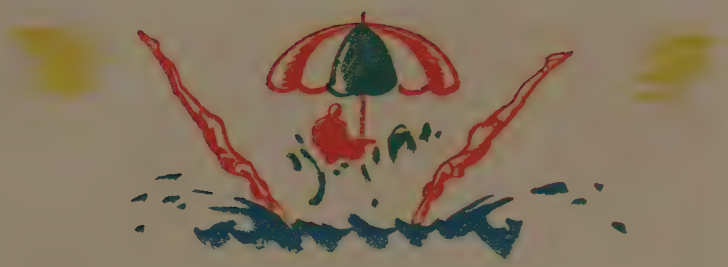
In any event it is no wonder that the sales in Coral Gables run a million dollars a week and that there is thirty million dollars of building under way at this writing.

CORAL GABLES was begun as an inland city; today it announces "forty miles of water front" and the how of that is interesting. Not only has it grown to take in Cocoplum Beach, on Biscayne Bay immediately south of aristocratic Coconut Grove, but also the sea is actually being brought back into the heart of the pine woods. Dredges are cutting canals both wide and deep from the bay, and digging lakes and yacht basins which will be linked up with the waters flowing out from the Everglades to form a vast circulating system of waterways. It is an enormous undertaking and one that looks fantastically extravagant on its face. But it is not. Every yard of rock dug by those dippers is worth two dollars for road and house building. The enterprise will pay for itself.

Gondolas from old Venice have been ordered for this new Venice; architects are draughting plans for "modified" Venetian houses, some as splendid as the palaces of the Doges, to border these canals. Residents will be

able to moor their yachts to their own doorsteps, or alongside the clipped velvet fairways of their country clubs. Gondolas, hydroplanes and sea sleds will take them to places of amusement, for it is a gay city, this Coral Gables, with every sort of entertainment provided for. Fancy moonlight on a Florida lagoon; palms black against the sky; night fragrant with the salt breath of the sea and your electric gondola out of juice! You and your girl friend should worry.

Coral Gables is already a city of hotels; there are six, aside from the imposing new Miami-Biltmore with its Spanish tower leaping twenty-six stories into the sky. Near the latter, and under the same management, is the most magnificently planned and elaborately appointed country club structure that I have ever seen. It has two eighteen-hole golf courses and between the club and the hotel is a swimming pool built on the scale which characterizes both. In connection with the Miami-Biltmore there will be a Casino and amusement center set upon an island in the bay and it is proposed to make of this an American Monte Carlo, a rendezvous for the fashionable who are in search of entertainment of whatever sort. The fourth unit in this particular enterprise will be a yacht club and all told they will call for an expenditure of some $25,000,000. Europe has nothing to compare with this effort to answer the question "Where shall we go and what shall we do?"



CHAPTER EIGHT

A Wide, Green and Gracious City

WHAT about those people who cannot afford or do not wish to play? Somebody has quite aptly described this distinctive suburb as "a wide, green and gracious city, preserving the right relation between a man's work and his welfare, his play and his environment." It is served by the five most important highways of South Florida and is being linked with downtown Miami by a modern rapid transit system. It is zoned, of course; one section is set aside for the building of apartments, another for a crafts center—a Spanish village with studios and workshops for making ironwork, pottery, tiles, furniture and the like. Everywhere there is light on four sides. Five sides, to be exact, for gloomy, leaden skies are unknown. There is room and a place for everything in Coral Gables except sweat shops and cramped living quarters.

Schools? Certainly. A seminary and a boys' military

Whispering Voices

academy, besides common schools so constructed that the children are practically out of doors. Yes, and a million dollar high school, and what is planned to be the finest university in the South. This latter will have one hundred and sixty acres in its grounds, but will be set in the heart of two thousand acres designed as one of the most beautiful residential parks in the world. Fifteen million dollars have been pledged as an endowment for this university and dredges are digging a lake upon which its campus will front.

A great sanitarium and hospital, directed by nationally famous physicians and health experts is another feature; so, too, is a million dollar Shrine Temple and Sports Center.

Such undertakings as these, you will agree, afford a significance, a dignity and a permanence to this amazing adventure into scientific city building quite above and apart from any other of the sort. And it may interest you to learn that the builder has expended more in his development than he has taken out in sales.

As an example of the Coral Gables adherence to the principle of harmony, take the Florida East Coast Railroad right-of-way which bisects its broad acres. Railroads are not things of beauty, except perhaps to the high salaried executives thereof. For the rest of us they just about ruin any scenery they run through. But here it is proposed to effect a miracle of beauty by building a three hundred foot concourse, a splendid park lavishly planted with tropical verdure. It will

extend entirely across the city and, with a huge station of pleasing lines and suitable architecture, will constitute one of the impressive features of the place. Instead of an eyesore this railroad right-of-way will be a delight and an inspiration. Perhaps the only one of its kind in America.

I hope I have painted some sort of picture of the new Florida which has come into being so lately and that I have made you acquainted in some sort with that poet and his ambition to create a City Beautiful. More than all, I hope I have conveyed to you the idea back of it. Coral Gables is no longer an engaging prospect, a mirage. It exists. And already it has had an effect greater than its creator could have visualized. Elsewhere other enterprises are being patterned after it. Coral Gables architecture is being copied throughout the state; there is a general expression of desire for not alone the beautiful but the harmonious as well, and for a blending of beauty and service.

MR. MERRICK and his talented associates have done much; there is much more to be done. That is the splendid, vital thing about Coral Gables; there are so many wonders now in the making and you know "dreams in their development have breath, tears, and tortures and the touch of joy."

It is a fine thing to reclaim the wilderness and make it bloom: to build schools and playgrounds, universities and churches: to put sunshine and air within the reach of families born and reared in smoky tenement

towns. A fine thing, indeed, to build houses "rich and full of pleasantries" and to people them with men and women eager to live brighter, healthier and more useful lives. There is a savor of Omnipotence about it.

The men who are flinging their millions into Florida real estate development are doing those very things. Some of them, no doubt, are interested primarily in profits but others there are to whom the work means more and to whom the greatest satisfaction will come from their knowledge that they have created something which will long outlive them.

Ten years of hard work, a hundred millions of hard money is what George Merrick plans to spend before he rests. Who can envisage what ten years will bring to that wonderland of Ponce de Leon's? Not you nor I. Nor Mr. Merrick, with all his soaring vision.

One thing he has already done and it is the biggest part of that accomplishment which I undertook to write about; he has proven that the practical can be romanticized and that "beauty draws more than oxen." He has sowed in the hearts of his fellowmen a deeper respect and a truer reverence for loveliness than they ever had before.

If he should cease his building today, turn his City Beautiful over to other hands and take up that writing for which his fingers itch, he would still have a splendid thing to his account. One could look upon Coral Gables and say with truth: " 'Fore God, you have here a goodly dwelling and a rich!"

FINIS